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KAPPAN

A JOURNAL FOR THE PROMOTION OF LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

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Background studies on day care
(See pag 81)

SCHOOL

White, Boardman + Riles

Year by year since the turn of the century the school-leaving age in our society has inched upward. Where in 1900 the median age at departure was younger than 11, formal schooling now occupies most youths to age 20 or later.

The school entrance age has moved downward much more slowly. But today, despite the financial crunch on all schools, several states are considering age four as a proper time to begin "formal" education. In May the Comprehensive Child Development Bill was reintroduced into Congress. It would put the federal government into the child-care business down to age two and younger.

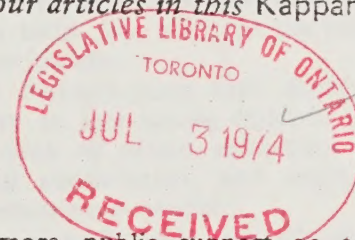
Whether early childhood schooling is sound educationally or as public policy is the concern of the first four articles in this Kappan.


Among interested professionals and many parents, the topic of pre-school education is a sure bet to arouse emotion. Especially during the last decade, when a good deal of attention has been focused on the issue, we have heard one strident voice after another. In this *Kappan*, Moore, Moon, and Moore present a provocative but reasonable analysis of the problem which to me merits serious consideration. Put simply, they claim that the recommendation of the California Report* that all children four years of age and older receive formal schooling is based on a seriously erroneous interpretation of research evidence, and indeed is directly contradicted by that evidence. The authors would rather

see more public support go toward preparing people to become effective parents and for programs for early detection and treatment of educational deficits. As for children without obvious difficulties, they would have the reader consider the idea that formal schooling ought to begin no sooner than the ninth year of life.

My colleagues and I have been studying the development of infants and young children for over 14 years. For the last seven, the work has been pursued at a graduate school of education. We have been continuously aware of the fact that though humans begin to learn at least as early as birth, most societies do not provide organized educational support until a child is six or seven years old. This has been the case for Western civilization for all its recorded history. It is my guess that the major reason for this tradition is that at six or seven years of age most children can be taught (in

*California Task Force Report, "Report of the Task Force on Early Childhood Education." Sacramento, Calif.: Wilson Riles, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education, November 21, 1971.





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WHEN SHOULD LEARNING BEGIN?

groups) to read without great difficulty. Substantial numbers of students of child development (including myself) are totally convinced that all children are being "educated" in areas of profound importance during the first six years of life. This education takes place mostly in the home. Too many children are failing this course of study, and failure at this stage apparently usually means failure throughout life. Until very recently, educators have paid relatively slight attention to questions of the curriculum, the staff, and the methods of the "informal schooling" of the first six years of a child's life. But, whether educators examine the process or not, it goes on for all children, and many of us believe that our current professional neglect of the educational developments of the first six years is a serious disservice to most children, including many we consider perfectly normal.

I believe that within a few decades most Western societies will assume public responsibility for guiding the educational development of all children from birth. I do not mean to say that all infants and toddlers will attend schools, although a minority may in cases where a child needs remedial treatment; or where a family (even with outside support) cannot provide minimally acceptable educational experiences for a baby.

If public responsibility for pre-school education does not mean formal schools, what does it mean? My ideas are quite compatible with those of Moore *et al.*

First of all, parents need to be educated for parenthood. If there are better and poorer ways to rear young children, we have to identify them and make them a serious part of our public

education curriculum. Over and above knowledge, families will often need other kinds of support. Parents we work with seem to need someone to talk with during more stressful periods, such as during an infant's second year of life when he becomes both more accident-prone and more negativistic.

Second, we do not currently know much about sensory development in the first years of life. The consequences of untreated sensory defects, especially in the areas of hearing and vision, can be devastating to a child, yet in most cases any but the grossest defects of this sort are not discovered until a child is six or seven years of age. We now have usable techniques for detecting most significant handicaps during the first three years. Each community will someday use these techniques in systematic ways.

Third, once a handicap is identified in an infant, we should treat it. In the case of a hearing deficit, hearing aids can be used, apparently with infants as young as six months of age. How can we tolerate letting children pass through the first three years of life, the period of language acquisition and primary socialization, with an undetected hearing loss? We are allowing this to happen every day to thousands of young children.

Here at Harvard we have been studying how some families provide remarkably effective early education for their young children. These families, affluent and poor, from many different backgrounds, are rearing children who at three years of age are remarkably competent. They not only score at about 140 on a standard I.Q. test, but they are equally impressive in their social abilities. In addition, they are not fragile or precocious little geniuses, but instead seem secure, independent, and happy.

We have been trying to discover what role the family's educational practices play in such beneficial outcomes. Though we do not have all the answers, we believe we have acquired much practical information. Studies such as ours can lead to a better-informed public, to better child-rearing practices, to better early education in the home, and to better development of children.

In Brookline, a suburb of Boston, we have begun a five-year test of the feasibility of a public school system assuming a formal professional role in guiding the educational development of children from birth. The plan has the following major features:

1. Strengthening each family's capacity to rear young children through provision of parent education, professional consultation, and support and materials when needed.

2. Identification of educationally relevant handicaps as early as possible through a systematic medical and psychological diagnostic program administered continuously from before the child is born on through the pre-school years.

3. Treatment of identified handicaps such as sensory deficits, language acquisition and other learning difficulties, mental retardation, etc., beginning at birth.

4. A high likelihood of continuity with elementary educational experiences by virtue of the fact that the school system is the initiator and director of this experimental venture.

Currently, we spend comparatively little public money on the education of children until they are six years of age. Subsequently, we tend to spend more and more each year as children move through the system. There is good rea-

"... we must ask if we are being subjected to a Chamber-of-Commerce-style rhetoric boosting the home-town product, or a scholarly effort to increase our knowledge about an important problem."

—Brademas

son to question the wisdom of this arrangement. It may turn out to be more sensible to invest heavily in the first years of a child's life and spend less as he moves through elementary and secondary education. Such a shift of resources would be sure to meet resistance, but I believe it is inevitable.

—Burton L. White

BURTON L. WHITE is director of the Pre-School Project, Laboratory of Human Development, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

In February, 1969, President Nixon told Congress, "So critical is the matter of early growth that we must make a national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life."

In December, 1971, President Nixon vetoed a measure passed by both houses of Congress, the Comprehensive Child Development Bill, aimed at achieving precisely this goal. Between the President's eloquent statement in 1969 and his veto message in 1971, the Select Education Subcommittee, which I have the honor to chair, the House Committee on Education and Labor, and a Senate subcommittee headed by Senator Walter F. Mondale (D-Minnesota) conducted the most extensive hearings Congress has ever held on early childhood programs. Last month, in May, the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee favorably reported a modified version of the vetoed bill. Even as I write, members of both the House and

the Senate are continuing this bipartisan effort to write legislation that would provide opportunities for health, nutrition, education, and other services for pre-school children, not only of families of the poor, as with Head Start, but for children of all income groups.

I recite this background in response to the request of *Kappan* editors for comment on the essay, "The California Report: Early Schooling for All?," prepared by the Hewitt Research Center, because the authors, who complain of a drive for earlier and earlier schooling which appears to be either overlooking or ignoring many of the most important findings of development research, appear either to be overlooking or ignoring the history of this major legislation. Indeed, only a few weeks ago, one of the authors of the Hewitt Report told me, to my astonishment, that he had not even read the Select Education Subcommittee hearings on the Comprehensive Child Development Bill.

When, therefore, we are told that "the Hewitt Research Center has involved leading educators, legislators, scholars, and researchers at local, state, and national levels from coast to coast in a review of early childhood research," we must ask if we are being subjected to Chamber of Commerce-style rhetoric boosting the home-town product, or a scholarly effort to increase our knowledge about an important problem. For, although strongly identified with child development legislation over the last two and a half years, neither I nor any member of my subcommittee staff was consulted by the Hewitt Center; nor, I find on inquiry, was the principal Senate sponsor of the Child Development Bill, Senator Mondale.

My point is certainly not wounded pride. It is simply the accuracy of the pretensions of Messrs. Moore, Moon, and Moore. Who are the "leading legislators at national levels" who were "involved" in the Hewitt Center review of early childhood research?

But I believe that the Hewitt report raises more important points and causes of concern for those of us who have for some time been toiling in the vineyard of early childhood programs. The authors appear either to have over-

looked or ignored the distinction between the phrases "early schooling" and "childhood development." There was a reason that the sponsors of the Comprehensive Child Development Bill called it that and not the "Early Schooling Bill." The reason is that our measure went beyond providing opportunity for cognitive growth for children. We included health, nutrition, and other services (hence "comprehensive") that affect the growth of the child (hence "development").

Messrs. Moore, Moon, and Moore appear to oscillate in their awareness of this distinction or, if they are aware of it, in their appreciation of its significance. Their paper seems to focus on the education in formal schools of very young children. Yet they contend that the "principal questions" they propose to treat are 1) "the best kind of intervention or care for young children" and 2) "the best and most financially feasible environment for early childhood development." The content of their paper reflects this continuing ambiguity of purpose. Does the Hewitt Center report pretend to address itself to the cognitive growth of young children in formal schools? Or does it seek as well to answer questions about the noncognitive aspects of the growth of young children? It is also unclear whether the authors intend to consider learning or development only as it takes place in formal schools. Do they include other settings as well?

What must in any event be clear is that the Hewitt writers have failed to make good on their own promise to treat their two "principal questions, the best kind of intervention or care for young children, and the best environment for early childhood development."

Although President Nixon broke his word on his 1969 commitment, he at least appears to have understood the differences between early schooling and childhood development. Moreover, the 1970 White House Conference on Children (which, I cannot resist noting, "involved leading educators, legislators, scholars, and researchers at local, state, and national levels from coast to coast") recommended as its number one priority "that the federal government fund

"The goal of the early childhood education proposal is that, by the end of the primary level, all our children will be excited about learning and able to proceed successfully...."

—Riles

comprehensive child-care programs, including health, early childhood education, and social services."

As I have been invited to comment on the significance of the Hewitt Center essay to the child development legislation now under consideration in Congress, I have not attempted to analyze the paper as it relates to the California proposal. In this connection I think it is essential that the reader have an opportunity to read both the report of the California Task Force on Early Childhood Education and the master plan in order to judge the accuracy and scholarship of both the California proposal and the Hewitt Report.

The Hewitt essay does, however, lead me to this general observation: Researchers who expect their work to be taken seriously must make a serious effort to be precise about their objectives. As I have indicated, ambiguity about whether they are studying early schooling or child development runs throughout the Moore, Moon, Moore report, making it difficult to evaluate their evaluations and, for those of us who are deeply desirous of as much scholarly evidence as we can get about the lives of children, rendering the Hewitt Center findings of little use. Based on the evidence presented to congressional committees over the last two and a half years, there is ample justification for President Nixon's 1969 call for "a national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life."

I have sent the authors of the Hewitt Report a copy of our subcommittee hearing.

—John Brademas

JOHN BRADEMAS (D-Indiana) is chairman of the House Select Education Subcommittee and sponsor of the Comprehensive Child Development Bill now before Congress. He was first elected to Congress in 1957 after serving as executive assistant to presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson. A Harvard graduate, magna cum laude, he is a former Rhodes Scholar.

The schools as they presently operate are failing many of our children. Everyone knows that. We all want to change it, but we know we cannot change it all at once. What we must do is find the best place to begin making the necessary changes, and I believe that early childhood is the best place to start.

Soon after I took office as California's state superintendent of public instruction, I appointed a group of distinguished researchers and experts to an *ad hoc* task force on early childhood education, with a mandate to rethink the education of primary children in this state. The task force was broadly representative, multi-ethnic, both men and women, and included parents, teachers, and experts from early childhood education, medicine, sociology, home economics, psychology, business, and architecture.

From the report of that task force came a declaration of priority from the California State Board of Education. The report became the framework for an implementation plan which is the basis for early childhood proposals now being considered by the state legislature.

In this brief article I can mention only some of the highlights of the current thrust for improvement of primary education in California.

Task Force Philosophy

The following passages drawn from their report summarize the philosophy of the *ad hoc* task force:

The Task Force on Early Childhood Education hereby dedicates itself to the proposition that since all men and women of every race and creed indeed do have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, it is the business of society to assure these rights for every child. He is, we emphasize, tomorrow's adult.

The past decade has produced a new body of educational, psychological, and medical research documenting the crucial importance of the first eight years of life.* And we are convinced that these early years are critical in determining the future effectiveness of

our citizens and in the long-range prevention of crime, poverty, addiction, malnutrition, neurosis, and violence. Even though research is still in progress and conclusions continue to evolve, we believe enough evidence is in to indicate that the following are clearly warranted now:

1. The people of the state of California must make a long-range commitment of funds to the proposition that the first eight years of life are the most important period in determining the future effectiveness of all our citizens.

2. Implicit in this commitment is the recognition of the desirability of providing educational opportunities for all children....

3. School should be a happy place, a stimulating environment without the traditional artificial barriers, which provides an opportunity for continuous progress to each child, based upon his own unique needs, interests, talents, and capabilities....

4. Because we recognize the importance of the parents in the education of children, we strongly affirm that parent education and involvement must be an integral part of all programs....

5. There must be encouragement of local autonomy and creativity in program development, with provision for maximum flexibility within broad state guidelines....

6. We believe it is essential that California establish at once for primary children a broadly based educational program that extends at least one year below the system now in existence....*

Plan Before Legislation

A bold, creative effort to redesign primary education in California is being made. Under the proposed plan, state financial support of public education is revised to devote a greater proportion of funds to the critical primary years. The pending legislation provides for completely restructuring the kindergarten and the present primary grades 1, 2, and 3 so that the individual needs of children can actually be met by means of an

*Benjamin S. Bloom, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964.

*California State Department of Education, *Report of the Task Force on Early Childhood Education*, Sacramento, December, 10, 1971, pp. 1-2.

educational program that is appropriate for each child. This will obviously require more and better prepared adults in the classroom, as well as better trained management personnel.

It is important to note that the California plan also provides for the optional inclusion of four-year-olds if their parents want them to have this educational opportunity, just as kindergarten has always been optional in this state. Such learning experiences will be oriented toward the child's development and should not be confused with "formal schooling" in the traditional sense or efforts to begin "academics" earlier. Age six is the legal age for school entrance in California. The new plan does not change that.

The key issue in the California proposal, however, is not the admission of four-year-olds. Rather, it is establishing an improved, more effective program for all primary children. There is, of course, no point in sending a four-year-old into any type of learning environment not geared to his needs, interests, talents, and capacities. The primary school as visualized by the task force is characterized above all by an educational environment which is responsive to the individual differences of all children, slow or fast, disadvantaged or not, of whatever race and color.

Implementation Plans

Planners expect a gradual phase-in over the next six years. Plans call for each local school district to submit a master plan for early childhood education which must focus on the needs of the children to be served. Districts must define their goals and objectives for those children. They must design appropriate learning experiences for them. Evaluation must be provided for. Parents and the community must be included in the planning and evaluation. Coordination of all existing school and community resources which affect the education of primary children is required in order to secure program approval under guidelines to be adopted by the state board of education.

What Results Can We Expect?

What will the California plan do for children? It offers individualization, with parents, volunteers, aides, and older students working under the direction of the teacher to provide help for each child when it is needed, not in a later grade when it is more costly and less effective; to inspire interest and motivation; to allow for continuous progress, building upon success and ensuring positive attitudes of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-control. Included, for those who qualify, will be whatever

additional services are needed, if not otherwise available. It is recognized that such things as extended day care, health, nutrition, and other social services are all factors which affect a child's well-being and success in school.

These are not new ideas. They just need to be put into action. The heart of the California plan is to stop talking and start doing.

The goal of the early childhood education proposal is that, by the end of the primary level, all our children will be excited about learning and able to proceed successfully with the rest of their school experience, having achieved sufficient command of the skills basic to reading, language, and arithmetic to enable them to do so.

What will it do for families? No longer can we afford the mistakes of the past in telling parents "hands off," that only educators know what is best for their children. This plan will create a parent-school partnership that will strengthen the family by closer home-school ties, make parent education available, and give parents a real voice in the education of their children to an extent we have never before realized.

What will it do for communities? It will create a school-community partnership; provide for coordination of all community services and resources, public and private, with the school; offer an

opportunity for older students to work with primary pupils to the great benefit of both. It will coordinate community, state, and federal agency efforts for young children, and will involve the community in assessing the total early childhood education effort.

Summary

I think a fitting close to this brief description is the following quotation from the task force report:

It is time to do a better job of what we already know should be done for young children in school. Let us incorporate the best of what we have learned from all the various kinds of existing pre-school programs, from kindergarten, and from the primary grades with the most promising results derived from a continual review of new research. Given the time, effort, thought, and public resources necessary, we believe the primary school described in this report would welcome rather than fear the increasing emphasis on accountability.

-Wilson Riles

WILSON RILES (130, Sacramento California Field Chapter) is superintendent of public instruction and director of education, California Department of Education.

Members of the California Task Force on Early Childhood Education

The task force included Marian Anderson, CAEYC, instructor in sociology and home economics, Sacramento City College; Alvia Barfield, president, Association of Classroom Teachers, NEA; Leslie Brinegar, chief, Division of Special Education, State Department of Education; James Collins, superintendent, Mill Valley Schools; Ramon Cortines, assistant superintendent, Pasadena Schools; Edith Dowley, professor of psychology and education, Stanford University; John Goodlad, dean, School of Education, UCLA; Frederick Hodges, M.D., chief deputy director, State Department of Public Health; James Jordan, coordinator of the Follow Through program for California; Dennis Mangers, elementary principal, Fountain Valley; Dan Moore, educational program manager, Los Angeles Times-Mirror Company; Louise Peterson, pre-school educational chairman, California Congress of Parents and Teachers; Robert Ponce, consultant, Ventura Coun-

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